

A Family Alone – Chapter 1 – Monthly Shopping Trip

“I’ll help you unload the car,” Tom told April.

“I have to divide the packages of meat and seal them in vacuum bags.”

“Do you need help?”

“Not really Tom. When did they say the generator would be here?”

“3-4 weeks. It comes directly from the factory. “

“Where are you putting it?”

“Next to the house near the main distribution panel. I can run a gas pipe from the LP tank to power it.”

“I thought you were going to order the 15kw unit.”

“I was, but it’s twice the price of the 12kw unit and the 12kw unit puts out almost 100 amps. You only got your wish because there was a long backorder on the RS12000. I’d rather spend the money on extra food. How are we coming anyway? Will this batch fill the freezer?”

“Completely and the freezers in the refrigerators too. I feel a little foolish storing so much food. I hope we don’t have a power outage before the new generator gets here and you get it installed.”

“We can always power the refrigerators and freezer with my portable generator. I’m going to permanently install it in the pickup and connect it to the gas tank when I get back. With the 35 gallon tank and the 98-gallon cross-bed tank, I can keep everything frozen for quite a while.”

“Still, I feel better when we have the standby installed.”

“Tired of the power outages? I don’t believe that there really is a power shortage. I think it’s those companies manipulating the available power. To hell with them! The Governor isn’t helping anything either, he’s going to bankrupt the state. Do you want to go with me when I go to Reno tomorrow?”

“I don’t think so. What you’re going to do is illegal, Tom. Are you totally certain that those guns are off the books? What’s going to happen if they search your pick up when you come back across the border into California?”

“They won’t find a thing, April. Are you positive that you don’t want a M1A? They’re about the same price as the AR you told me to get you.”

“I want something I can handle. You’ve got 6” and 60 pounds on me. No, the gas piston AR will be fine. Can you put an Aimpoint sight on it?”

“Whatever you want, sure. I might put one on the M1A too; it depends on what’s available. I set up the portable generator in case the lights go out while I’m gone. You have several hours of run time in the tank. Just shut it down and refill it if the outage lasts more than 7 hours. I’m going to store the extra batteries in the spare refrigerator, is that ok with you?”

“Sure, I’m only using the freezer compartment anyway. How long do you think you’ll be gone?”

“Not that long, I’ll take 120 to 395 and take it to Reno. He said he’d be waiting for me so it will just be up and back. I should be home for supper.”

“Just be careful, you don’t want to get caught with an AR-15 or the M1A. Even the high capacity magazines would land you in jail. I’ll run back to Fresno tomorrow and get the ammo. How much do you want?”

“Five cases of the 7.62×51mm surplus and 5 cases of the 5.56×45mm. 5,000 rounds for each rifle should let us get in some practice and have enough if there’s trouble. You can leave it in your trunk and I’ll unload it when I get home.”

“Do you think we’re going to have trouble, really? I don’t have any trouble with the extra food and the standby power, Lord knows we get snowed in often enough and the power is off enough to justify being prepared. But the idea of needing to protect ourselves with firearms pushes the limit a little. Don’t you agree?”

“Let’s say that I believe in being prepared, April. We still don’t know for sure what is going to happen on New Year’s. They may say that they’re prepared, but why did they have to wait until this late to prepare for the Millennium? I’d better call the propane company and have them top off the tank. I’ll have Chevron top off the gas tank while I’m at it. Do you need to get anything else while you’re in Fresno tomorrow?”

“I’ll know better after I have everything put away. Why don’t you pack the bulk food in the 6 gallon pails while I finish up packaging the meat?”

“Sure, do we have enough oxygen absorbers?”

“There’s a new box on the shelf and more plastic bags too. I might stop by that restaurant supply tomorrow and pick up some of those large strapped loaf pans they have for the 24 ounce loaves of bread. Should I get one or two? Each one makes 3 loaves.”

“Better get two, April. Look for a used commercial bread slicer while you’re at it. I’ll get going on packing the beans, rice and wheat. Holler if you need any help.”

Tom and April Henson lived north of Fresno in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada's. They were young, in their 30's, and didn't have any children. Tom had put in 12 years in the Army but had gotten out with a minor disability. It wasn't enough to keep him from working, but it was enough to preclude him staying in. April and he had married out of high school, in Fresno in 1986. It was only later that they learned that they couldn't have any children. They had talked about adopting, but it was difficult to do. They had taken advantage of an insurance settlement, when April's parents had died, to buy the acreage with the old house. They were about 5 miles from their nearest neighbor and near the end of the road.

Over the past summer, they found out why they got the property as cheaply as they did. Every time they turned around, they lost power. Tom had been looking for a job for months without any success. April sold Watkins products and had put up a website. Her business had really taken off and while they weren't getting rich, they were getting by comfortably. Tom had given up looking and contented himself to package the orders and deliver them to the nearest UPS office. They had converted an outbuilding into a storage facility for April's inventory. April contended that with her business growing as fast as it was, Tom had a full time job just helping her.

Tom had been in the infantry in the Army, a Sergeant First Class. He'd gotten through Desert Storm without a scratch, but had been injured in a HMMWV accident. His right knee was a mess and even after surgery, he had a slight limp. He had been in physical therapy trying to get his knee up to full strength. His physical therapist had told him the previous week that they had done about as much as they could. He should continue his exercises, at home, but there was no further need for him to drive to Fresno for the sessions. His military disability pay was 25% of his regular pay since each limb was worth 25%.

He had an old Army buddy who sold guns in Reno. He'd talked to his friend and the friend told him that he'd sell him the weapons. They weren't class III firearms, only semi-autos, but you couldn't get anything exactly like them in California. He had new and good used weapons that Tom could choose from. He guaranteed everything he sold new and used.

◦

Early the next morning, Tom left for Reno. It took him about 5 hours to get there and by 11am, he was back on the road heading home. Meanwhile, April had driven into Fresno, filled in the things they missed the day before at Costco and had made several other purchases. April had a Colt Commander pistol and Tom the full sized M1911. While she was at the gun store, she picked up the .45ACP ammo, 2,000 rounds. It was the 230 gr. Speer Gold Dot ammo. That rounded out their ammo supplies. They had special ordered the pistol ammo because the dealer didn't usually have 2 cases on hand. She had also picked up the rolls of silver coins from the coin dealer. They now had 10 rolls each of silver halves, quarters and dimes.

When she got home, April left the ammo in her car and got on her computer to print out the orders they'd gotten over the weekend. It took her most of the day to box up the orders and she'd call UPS to pick them up this time. Her shipping and handling charges would cover the shipping costs either way, but having Tom deliver the packages to UPS gave them a slightly lower shipping rate, and was a small source of revenue. Over the course of a year, it did make a difference.

Tom was home by 4pm. He unloaded her car and put the ammo away. He had picked up good used weapons and both were equipped with the Aimpoint sights. He hadn't had any trouble crossing back into California because of his California plates. It was supposed to be Agricultural inspection anyway, not the Gestapo, although sometimes he wondered.

"Did you have any trouble?"

"Not coming home I didn't. The problem was in Reno. Dave must have misunderstood me; I was specific what I wanted. He had a gas piston M16A3 for you and a M1A Super March for me. Same price, too. I picked up the magazines, 13 for you and 21 for me. I also picked up a 10 pack of Colt 7-rounders for our pistols."

"I guess we're ready for the invasion, huh?" April laughed. "Did you buy anything else?"

"Well, he did have Saiga shotguns and the 12-round magazines. I got you a 20-gauge and a 12-gauge for me."

"I wish I'd have known and I could have picked up some of the shotgun ammo."

"No need, he had it and I bought enough to last us for a while. UPS is here, I help him load the boxes."

"I didn't know if you'd be in home in time so I called them to make the pickup."

"That's fine, April. What's for supper?"

"I left out a package of ground beef, is meatloaf ok?"

"Baked potatoes?"

"Yes and fresh asparagus."

"Sure, you go ahead and start dinner and I'll help him load."

o

As we all know, the fear that gripped the nation prior to the Millennium didn't come to pass in any meaningful way. To be sure, some companies had problems, but it wasn't the end of the world like they were predicting. Eventually, the new Onan RS15000 generator was delivered and Tom got an electrician to install the 100-amp automatic transfer switch. He ran 20' of the black gas pipe from their LP tank and connected it to the generator using a short length of the flexible high-pressure line. The other end was similarly connected to the LP tank with a flex line. Their above ground gasoline storage tank held 500 gallons of gasoline and their above ground LP tank held 3,000-gallons of propane, net.

Tom and April had purchased a 60' section of corrugated 10' culvert and had built their own storm shelter. They had excavated a hole and hired a crane to set the culvert into the hole. Tom had spent a couple of months welding on the $\frac{3}{8}$ " end caps and working on the inside. Beneath the floor were deep cycle batteries storing thousands of amp hours of electricity. He had a heavy-duty inverter to power the electric hot plate but the remainder of the shelter was all a 12-volt electrical system. It wasn't fancy, but it achieved their goal.

In that part of the US, they didn't get tornadoes, just earthquakes. To the west was the San Andreas Fault and not that far away (~50 air miles) were Mammoth and the Long Valley Caldera. Tom and April lived near Hildreth. Earthquake activity within and adjacent to the caldera had remained low since mid-1999 averaging just five to 10 earthquakes per day with magnitudes less than M 2 and an occasional event as large as M 3. They didn't feel most of the earthquakes. However, considering their location, they both thought the shelter was a good idea.

Their life was rather routine handling the Watkins orders and keeping themselves prepared for whatever might happen. They still got snowed in over the course of the winter of 1999-2000. They also lost power a few times when ice pulled down the electrical lines. It didn't matter, the standby generator kicked in and they didn't have any problems other than an occasional problem getting the orders to UPS. During the summer of 2000, Dave called Tom and told him that he had made a large purchase of similar weapons Tom had bought the last time. He could give Tom a very good price on the weapons and surplus ammo. When the weather cleared, April and Tom both went to Reno. They spent a couple of days gambling and came home with more weapons, magazines and ammo. The rifles were an M1A Super Match and another M16A3 gas piston conversion. They added a pair of Browning Hi-Powers.

They came home with the rifles plus the same magazine assortment, just twice as many. The weapons were free because April had hit a \$1 slot at just the right time. The casino withheld on the winnings and they still had a fair amount of money after they'd made the purchase from Dave. They went into Fresno to the coin dealer and acquired gold and silver Eagles. Gold had hit \$272 in London and the remainder of April's winnings went into coins. With the dealer's markup, the final price of gold was \$299 an ounce. While the Eagles are only 22 carat gold, they contain 1 full troy ounce of pure

(24 carat) gold. The silver Eagles had a spot market ratio of 62:1 with gold and cost them \$5 an ounce.

A Family Alone – Chapter 2 – Summer Gardening

Tom and April wintered over 2000-2001 and were kept moderately busy with their Watkins orders. They didn't grow much in their garden, potatoes, squash, watermelon and one tomato and one pepper plant. They had the means to can, but it wasn't worth the time and effort. By the time you bought jars, lids and counted your time, it was less expensive to buy food at Costco. However, every weekend, weather permitting, they went to Fresno and shopped the garage sales. In the interval since they'd moved to the Hildreth area, they had accumulated hundreds, if not thousands, of jars all carefully boxed and stored against a future need. There were several cases of lids, some with and some without rings.

Tom bought 2 30 quart All American pressure canners from Canning Pantry in Utah. The Canning Pantry wasn't the cheapest when it came to the canning lids however. They also bought a hose and regulator separately for a used propane stove. The advantage to the larger pressure cooker was that it would do 14 quarts or 19 pints. While it was more expensive, over the long haul, they could make up the cost with saved propane. Assuming they ever had to can.

"Why don't we put in several tomato plants this year and can our own spaghetti sauce? I don't much care for the stuff they have in the stores."

"Ok, how many plants do you want?"

"The recipe I have for Spaghetti sauce requires 30 pounds of tomatoes. Maybe you should ask the nursery how many plum tomato plants it would take to produce 30 pounds of tomatoes at a time."

"How much sauce does that make?"

"About 9 pints, according to the recipe."

"So you're going to need over 100 pounds of tomatoes to make 14 quarts of sauce. I'll inquire. We need to get one of those extractors while we're at it. It was Canning Pantry, I'll order one."

o

6 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup chopped onions
1 cup green bell pepper, chopped
2 tbs. oregano
4 tbs. fresh parsley, minced
2 tsp. black pepper
4 tsp. salt
1/2 cup brown sugar

1/4 cup vegetable oil
30 pounds tomatoes

o

“He told me just to plant a dozen plants and see how we came out.”

“That’s fine; we don’t want to go overboard. We can do pint jars of tomato sauce plus several batches of green beans in quart jars. We can fill up the shelves for very little work.”

“I agree. I don’t think we want to plant any more sweet corn than it would take to have 3 or 4 batches of corn on the cob, do you?”

“No, 3 or 4 times is probably plenty. With just the 2 of us, it’s cheaper to buy vegetables than can most of the time. I think we can stop buying jars. Otherwise you’re going to have to build a bigger shed.”

“There go the lights again. Dammit, I don’t understand why we keep having power outages.”

“The paper said that there is an energy shortage and the Governor is between a rock and a hard spot.”

During the summer of 2001, April handled the Watkins orders and Tom tended to the garden and did the canning. When she wasn’t busy, she helped him snap beans, juice the tomatoes and whatever. Tom acquired used office storage cabinets to store their food. These all went into the basement and the cabinets were attached to the walls so they wouldn’t tip over. In the space above the cabinets he stored their paper products. He was done with canning when the first of September rolled around. The onions had been harvested and were drying. The only crop left to bring in was the potato crop.

On the morning of 9/11/01, April was boxing orders and Tom was sitting at the kitchen table reading the paper. The radio was on in the background. He heard the announcement about a plane crashing into the World Trade Center and put on the TV to see if they were carrying coverage. Needless to say, they were.

“April, come watch TV. A passenger airliner crashed into the World Trade Center in New York.”

“What? How could that happen? Those are the tallest buildings in the world, aren’t they?”

“If not the tallest, close; Sears tower in Chicago, is the tallest, I think. The north tower is burning.”

“Look a jet is flying into the other building.”

“April, one crash could be an accident. Two crashes have to be terrorism.”

“Switch to CNN and see what they have for coverage.”

“They’re showing both crashes over. Wait they’re changing to the Pentagon. Damn, a plane just hit the Pentagon.”

“Who would do such a thing?”

“The last attack on the WTC was by Muslims. That happened just after Noon on February 26, 1993, if I remember.”

“There’s the President.”

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a difficult moment for America. I, unfortunately, will be going back to Washington after my remarks. Secretary Rod Paige and the Lt. Governor will take the podium and discuss education. I do want to thank the folks here at Booker Elementary School for their hospitality.

Today we’ve had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack on our country. I have spoken to the Vice President, to the Governor of New York, to the Director of the FBI, and have ordered that the full resources of the federal government go to help the victims and their families, and to conduct a full-scale investigation to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act.

Terrorism against our nation will not stand.

And now if you would join me in a moment of silence. May God bless the victims, their families, and America. Thank you very much.

Later that day, Bush issued a press release:

I want to reassure the American people that the full resources of the federal government are working to assist local authorities to save lives and to help the victims of these attacks. Make no mistake: The United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.

I’ve been in regular contact with the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, the national security team and my Cabinet. We have taken all appropriate security precautions to protect the American people. Our military at home and around the world is on high alert status, and we have taken the necessary security precautions to continue the functions of your government.

We have been in touch with the leaders of Congress and with world leaders to assure them that we will do whatever is necessary to protect America and Americans.

I ask the American people to join me in saying thanks for all the folks who have been fighting hard to rescue our fellow citizens and to join me in saying a prayer for the victims and their families.

The resolve of our great nation is being tested. But make no mistake: We will show the world that we will pass this test. God bless.

That evening, Bush addressed the nation:

Good evening. Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.

The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong.

A great people have been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.

America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.

Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America – with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could.

Immediately following the first attack, I implemented our government's emergency response plans. Our military is powerful, and it's prepared. Our emergency teams are working in New York City and Washington, DC to help with local rescue efforts.

Our first priority is to get help to those who have been injured, and to take every precaution to protect our citizens at home and around the world from further attacks.

The functions of our government continue without interruption. Federal agencies in Washington which had to be evacuated today are reopening for essential personnel tonight, and will be open for business tomorrow. Our financial institutions remain strong, and the American economy will be open for business, as well.

The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.

I appreciate so very much the members of Congress who have joined me in strongly condemning these attacks. And on behalf of the American people, I thank the many world leaders who have called to offer their condolences and assistance.

America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism. Tonight, I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.'

This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.

Thank you. Good night, and God bless America.

Except to get up to use the bathroom or get more coffee, April and Tom were glued to the TV until after the President addressed the nation.

"What now?" April asked.

"I guess we'll be going to war."

"With whom?"

"Whoever they end up blaming the attacks on."

The following day, a reporter asked Ari Fleischer, Ari, all the fingers are being pointed at Osama bin Laden and Afghanistan; he is being helped by, supported by Taliban and bases in Pakistan. So are we talking about now going against Afghanistan or Pakistan? And if it happened, then it is all in the name of Islam. So is it time now for the United States not to wait anymore, more innocent people will be killed in the name of terrorism?

Fleischer responded: I was asked earlier about who we believe is the source of this. And I indicated that the United States continues to gather the facts about that information. So your question presupposes the answer, and I'm not prepared to do that.

A Family Alone – Chapter 3 – The War on Terror

Secretary Powell has said that bin Laden is the prime candidate for these terrorist attacks. Is that the view of the White House? And secondly, can you straighten out for us whether or not the administration intends to use military personnel as sky marshals, or in any other way, to secure civilian aircraft flights?

On your first question, I think what the Secretary said was – he was asked a question about is bin Laden a suspect, and he indicated yes. I don't think he said "prime," but I'd have to check the record on that. But he did indicate yes. On the question of the military, Jim, I just – I'll have to find out from the Department of Transportation. When you asked me this morning I tried to refer you to Transportation. I don't have that information here.

On 9/15/01 Bush told reporters:

Sir, are you satisfied that Osama bin Laden is at least a kingpin of this operation?

There is no question he is what we would call a prime suspect. And if he thinks he can hide and run from the United States and our allies, he will be sorely mistaken.

On September 17th, Bush told reporters: *The focus right now is on Osama bin Laden, no question about it. He's the prime suspect, and his organization. But there are other terrorists in the world. There are people who hate freedom. This is a fight for freedom. This is a fight to say to the freedom-loving people of the world: we will not allow ourselves to be terrorized by somebody who thinks they can hit and hide in some cave somewhere.*

The UN Security Council also issued a resolution on September 18, 2001 directed towards the Taliban demanding that they hand over the terrorist Osama bin Laden and close all terrorist training camps immediately and unconditionally. The council also referred to a resolution it adopted in December 2000 demanding that the Taliban turn over bin Laden to the United States or a third country for trial in the deadly bombings of the two US embassies in Africa in August 1999.

On September 20, 2001, Bush addressed a joint session of Congress:

On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars – but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war – but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks – but never before on thousands of civilians. All of this was brought upon us in a single day – and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.

Americans have many questions tonight. Americans are asking: Who attacked our country? The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda. They are the same murderers indicted for bombing American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, and responsible for bombing the USS Cole.

Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world – and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere. The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics – a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam. The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinction among military and civilians, including women and children.

This group and its leader – a person named Osama bin Laden – are linked to many other organizations in different countries, including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. There are thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries. They are recruited from their own nations and neighborhoods and brought to camps in places like Afghanistan, where they are trained in the tactics of terror. They are sent back to their homes or sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction.

The leadership of al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country. In Afghanistan, we see al Qaeda's vision for the world.

Afghanistan's people have been brutalized – many are starving and many have fled. Women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough.

The United States respects the people of Afghanistan – after all, we are currently its largest source of humanitarian aid – but we condemn the Taliban regime. It is not only repressing its own people, it is threatening people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists. By aiding and abetting murder, the Taliban regime is committing murder.

And tonight, the United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land. Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned. Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in your country. Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities. Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating.

These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion. The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.

I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.

Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

It had taken the President of the United States from September 11, 2001 until September 20, 2001 to put a face on the 'monsters' officially.

On October 7, 2001 at 12:30 pm EDT (9 PM local time) the United States, supported by Britain, began its attack on Afghanistan, launching bombs and cruise missiles against Taliban military and communications facilities and suspected terrorist training camps.

In his March 17, 2003 address to the nation, President Bush demanded that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his two sons Uday and Qusay leave Iraq, giving them a 48-hour deadline. All three refused this demand.

Since the invasion began without the explicit approval of the United Nations Security Council, some legal authorities regard it as a violation of the UN Charter, and therefore unauthorized. At approximately 02:30 UTC or about 90 minutes after the lapse of the 48-hour deadline, at 5:30 am local time, explosions were heard in Baghdad. At 03:15 UTC, or 10:15 pm EST, President Bush announced that he had ordered the coalition to launch an "attack of opportunity" against specified targets in Iraq.

◦

"What are they calling this one, Gulf War #2?" April asked.

"Operation Iraqi Freedom, April."

"What do they call the thing in Afghanistan?"

"Enduring Freedom."

"Yeah right, and Lincoln freed the slaves," April chuckled. "I thought it was over. Bush made that speech from that aircraft carrier."

“They’re still looking for the WMDs. They probably won’t find them unless they look in Syria. I’m concerned about other things. Russia and China announced joint maneuvers after the first of the year and apparently Russia is selling 40 Backfire Cs to the Chinese.”

“I thought that India was buying a couple Akula IIs from the Russians.”

“It was supposed to be a lease/purchase. India’s interested in leasing a pair of Type 971 SSNs is based in part on the slow progress in the Advanced Technology Vessel. As of November 2001 it was reported that the terms of lease for a single Akula II/Schuka-B class nuclear-powered submarine had been finalized in September 2001. The submarine, to be leased for three years at a price of \$25 million, was expected to arrive in Vishakapatnam in early 2002. However, as of February 2002 the Russian submarines were slated to begin service in the Indian Navy in 2004 under a five-year lease. India was to help finance the construction of the two new Akula class boats with the proceeds allowing Russia to complete the first Type 855 SSN. At that time no agreement had been reached on the transfer of the Admiral Gorshkov aircraft carrier, the proposed lease of two Akulas, or the purchase of four Tu-22M Backfire bombers.

“As of mid-2002 the Indian Ministry of Defense was saying little about a move to lease-purchase two Project 971 class nuclear submarines from Russia. But negotiations were reported to be at an advanced stage and India’s commitment could include providing money to enable Russia to complete construction work on the subs. The subs in question were believed to be of the Project 971 improved Akula-II class.

“On 20 January 2004 India finalized the purchase of the Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov after over a decade of negotiations. But Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov and Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes did not reach agreement on other weapons, such as the Tu-22 Backfire bombers or Akula-class nuclear submarines. The Russian are down to a single Typhoon, 7 of the Delta IV and 4 of the Delta III ballistic missile subs. They supposedly have 9 of the Akula class attack subs. They may also have one of their cruise missile subs. They also have a bunch of Kilos left over.”

“You’ve been reading again.”

“I looked up a few things on Global Security when I heard about the joint maneuvers and the Backfires.”

“Bush got reelected but I think he’s going to really catch hell over Iraq in his second term Tom. They didn’t find any of the WMDs so maybe you right and they’re all in Syria. Do you plan to watch the Inauguration?”

“Nope. I voted more against Kerry than for Bush. On another subject, do you want to try and adopt again?”

"I don't think I can take the heartbreak honey. Maybe we could sign up to offer foster care."

"I doubt that would work out April. With the roads closed every winter off and on, we couldn't keep a foster child in school. Sorry. Maybe we should look into adopting and older child instead of a baby."

"How old?"

"Maybe 7 or 8. By that age, most of the kids have been pretty thoroughly picked over. The child would have to know that he or she was wanted if we selected them."

"But would they select us?"

"Hard to say. There are a lot of kids in foster care waiting for someone to adopt them."

"I'll look into it. We've been screened 3 times; maybe it won't take so long. All they need to do is update the previous reports."

"I'm game if you are. I don't think we're too old, do you? Thirty-six would be about right for a child between 8 and 12. If you get the papers, I'll help you fill them out."

o

"Hello Mrs. Henson, planning on trying again?"

"Tom and I talked it over and considering our age, perhaps we could adopt an older child."

"What age did you have in mind?"

"No younger than 8 and no older than 14."

"We have several children in that age group. Since you just did the paperwork not all that long ago, we can have you update everything and give it a try. I don't suppose that you'd be interested in providing foster care for a boy and a girl, would you?"

"Related?"

"Brother and sister. She's 13 and he's 11. Their parents were abusing them and we took them out of the home. The hearing to terminate the parental rights has been completed. They didn't do well in the first home where we placed them and the one they're in now isn't meeting their needs. We could have them placed with you on a temporary basis in short order. Do you need to talk to your husband?"

A Family Alone – Chapter 4 – Instant Family

“Tom sent me in to pick up the paperwork. What else would we have to do?”

“Update your paperwork, submit information on your financial status and another home visit.”

“Give me the forms and I’ll talk to Tom.”

“Did he get a job?”

“No, we decided that with my business volume, it would take the two of us to keep up with the business. Watkins Products, remember? Our mail order business has really taken off since I put up a website a few years back.”

“Here’s the form set. Please complete them and return them as soon as possible.”

“Can you tell me anything more about the children?”

“She’s an 8th grader and he’s in 6th grade. Their names are Sam and Rob.”

“Sam? Do you mean Samantha?”

“That’s her name but she insists on being called Sam. Rob’s full name is Robert. I’ll tell you right up front, neither of them is very trusting. Especially after 2 foster homes in a little over a year.”

o

“What do you think; can we handle 2 at the same time?”

“Eleven and thirteen? I suppose we could give it a try, where’s the paper work?”

“Right here; she told me that we could just attach our latest tax return and bank statement. We could be approved in a month.”

“Did you ask about home schooling?”

“That would be subject to the approval of the school district. She said that given our remote location, the DCFS wouldn’t automatically disallow it.”

Tom reached into a desk draw and extracted 2 file folders.

“Make them copies, I don’t want to give up the originals of either the tax returns or the bank statement. Let’s do the paperwork and I’ll process the orders tomorrow while you take them back. Anything else we need to do?”

“Just the usual home visit. If the kids work out, we can put in additional paperwork to adopt them.”

“How is the road? Is it clear enough for another trip down the hill?”

“It’s fine, Tom. They bladed it and the sun melted off the remaining snow. I’ll be ok.”

“Are you satisfied with this arrangement April? I’d hate to see you become attached and then not get approved if we wanted to adopt.”

“We can cross that bridge when we come to it. Ready to get started?”

o

“Back so soon? I didn’t expect to see you for a week.”

“The road was clear and Tom and I did the papers last night.”

“We go through them and let you know whether or not to expect a home visit. There shouldn’t be any problem. Besides, we need to move those kids as soon as possible. Sam has already run away once.”

“She could try that in our area, but she wouldn’t get too far. It’s a long walk to the nearest neighbor.”

“What do you do when the phones go out?”

“Cell phone. Doesn’t everyone have one?”

“I suppose so. Ok, Mrs. Henson, I give you a call when everything has been processed.”

“Thank you. Let me give you my cell phone number in case the phone lines go down again.”

“Does that happen a lot where you live?”

“It seems like it happens every winter. Ice takes out the phone and electrical lines. We have a standby generator so we always have power and of course the cell phone so we’re never out of touch.”

“Does your road close often?”

“Afraid so. The Country has us on the bottom of their grading list.”

“What about school for Sam and Rob?”

“We’re going to apply with the school district to offer them home schooling, an education is so important these days.”

o

A month later, they got a call to expect a home visit, two days hence. It came when they were up to their ears in orders and April didn’t have time to thoroughly clean house. That was a chore usually reserved for Saturdays. Sunday mornings they usually went to Church and if they needed anything, they went shopping on Sunday afternoon.

“I had a devil of a time finding this place,” the social worker said.

“We’re at the end of the road.”

“Big house. How old is it?”

“It must be at least 100 years old. It’s been modified over the years and the previous owner added insulation. This is the kitchen, of course.”

“Is that a wood stove?”

“Yes. Tom bought it for me for Christmas. They’re made in Canada. That room there is the den/office. This is the dining room and the next room is the living room. That’s where the stairs to the upstairs are located.”

“Ok, this is our room, and there are 3 other bedrooms so should the kids come to live with us, we thought they could choose their own room. Would you like a cup of coffee? We can sit at the kitchen table to visit.”

“You’re self-employed?”

“Watkins products mostly mail order. I’ll get Tom; he’s packing orders at the moment.”

“You have a lovely home.”

“Thanks. It needs dusting, but that’s a Saturday chore and frankly, I couldn’t take time to dust before your visit.”

“Your home isn’t dirty. You should see some of the homes we visit. I noticed antennas on the out buildings, is one of you a ham?”

“Tom has a General license and I’m a coded Technician.”

“You’ve been trying to adopt for a while, haven’t you?”

“We’d all but given up. Infants are difficult to come by. Then, Tom suggested we might want to adopt older children. What’s next?”

“We’d foster the children with you for a few months and see how that goes. If it works out satisfactorily and the children agree, adoption would be the next step. What are you going to do for bedroom furniture?”

“We talked it over and decided to let Sam and Rob pick out their own, assuming they come to live with us.”

“I think you might want to pick the kids up and take them shopping.”

“You mean we’re approved?”

“There is still a lot of paperwork, but I’m going to recommend in favor of it, yes.”

“Can you arrange for us to pick them up and do some shopping in Fresno?”

“I think that can be arranged. I’ll call and let you know.”

◦

“Mrs. Henson? Sally Collins, the social worker. Can you pick up Sam and Rob at 10am on Saturday morning?”

“We’re approved?”

“You’re approved. Sorry we couldn’t give you more advance notice, but you’ll be taking them home with you.”

“We’ll have to bring a trailer and pick up new furniture for them. Where and when?”

“Be at our office at 10am. They don’t have much in the way of belongings.”

“Not a problem, we’ll be there.”

“Tom, we’re approved! We pick up Sam and Rob at 10am Saturday morning at the DCFS office in Fresno.”

“You don’t say. That was sudden, wasn’t it?”

“It sure was. I’ll clean up the bedrooms upstairs while you finish getting the orders around. We can pick them up, shop for furniture and maybe clothes. Ms. Collins said that they didn’t have much.”

◦

Saturday morning, 10am, Fresno...

“Sam and Rob, these folks are Tom and April Henson. They live up in the mountains and you’re going to be staying with them for a few months.”

“I just want to go home,” Sam slumped.

“Your father is in jail and we haven’t heard from your mother. You know that.”

“You must be Rob,” Tom said extending his hand.

“Hi,” Rob replied hesitantly.

“Do you have suitcases?”

“Just these duffel bags.”

“It looks like we need to go shopping. Do you kids want a few new clothes?”

“Already trying to bribe us and we aren’t even out of the office, Robbie.” Sam advised.

“Well little Miss hardcase. You’re going to need good clothes up in the Sierra Nevada’s.”

“Whatever.”

“Wal-Mart?”

“I think so.”

◦

“I like these,” Sam announced.

“Look over there Sam, no low rise jeans allowed.”

“Aww...”

“Shoes next, Tom?”

A Family Alone – Chapter 5 – Getting Acquainted

“Shoes and then furniture. Did you get them new underclothing?”

“I think we’ll go to Penny’s for that.”

“This is a pretty dress,” Sam said holding it up.

“You’re going to need something for Church, go ahead and try it on. Tom why don’t you find Rob a nice sports coat and some slacks?”

At Penny’s, they got underwear, two dresses for Sam, a sports coat, 2 pair of slacks and white shirts for Rob plus dress shoes. Next stop was a shoe store and Rob and Sam went with cowboy boots for everyday wear. Finally, they were ready to shop for furniture.

“We have 3 empty bedrooms in our home and no furniture. We thought that you might like to pick out your own bedroom furniture.”

“I want bunk beds,” Rob grinned.

“Ok, but you need a chest for your clothes and a desk to study at.”

“I want a poster bed,” Sam intoned.

“Maybe a trundle, Sam? Would you like a 9-drawer dresser too?”

“Whatever.”

They found a trundle poster bed and a 9-drawer dresser for Sam. They also got her a desk and 2 chairs. Rob got a bunk bed he picked out himself and a 5-drawer chest. He also got a desk and 2 chairs. They stopped by a Circuit City and picked up 2 inexpensive desktop computers. Then they were off to Hildreth and home.

“Where are we?” Sam asked. “This is like 1,000-miles from anywhere.”

“We’re only 35 miles from Fresno, Sam.”

“Where do we go to school?”

“Right here, we’re going to get Rob and you approved for home schooling.”

“We won’t learn a damned thing.”

“Watch your mouth, young lady,” April said. “No cussing allowed.”

“So what are you going to do? Beat me? Sic your husband on me to grope me?”

“None of the above. Tell me why your father is in jail.”

“They said he molested me.”

“Did he?”

“I suppose.”

“There’ll be none of that in this house, Sam. Was Rob molested too?”

“Mom was seeing someone.”

“And your father went to you?”

“Only when he was drinking.”

“How long did that go on?”

“Not very long, I complained to a neighbor and the next thing you knew, the cops showed up. They locked dad up and mom disappeared. Probably took off with her boyfriend.”

“There will be no groping or leering in this house. You’ll find things a little different than what you’re used to. We run our business out of our basement. It’s Watkins products and I have a website.”

“Where’s my TV?”

“We only have one TV and it’s in the living room.”

“What do you call this hell hole, Gulag 17?”

“We call it home.”

◦

“What did she mean by Gulag 17, Tom?”

“Sam was probably referring to the William Holden movie, *Stalag 17*.”

“She’s a tough one. When she unpacked, I noticed pads, so I’ll need to run to the store tomorrow and lay in a supply. Do we need anything else while I’m there?”

“Well, you might want to add additional toilet paper and paper towels.”

“She wanted to know where her TV was.”

“We have 4 satellite receivers, but do you think they need their own TV?”

“Maybe later. I have the impression from something that she said that the TV has been their babysitter for a very long time.”

“What about Internet access? I can run a cable and hook them into the switch. Those computers we bought have an integral Ethernet chip.”

“That can wait a while too, Tom. It appears that we have several things that we can use as rewards.”

“I’ll run the cables for the TV and internet when I have the time. When we’ve decided they earned something, I can hookup the cables.”

“That will be ok. Sam was molested by her father and I think her mother was running around on him, Sam said something about a boyfriend, more than once.”

“No wonder she acts the way she does. Pick up a couple of color TV’s from Costco, nothing fancy, and we’ll put them in the storage building for when they’ve earned a TV.”

o

“I had to go to Circuit City to get the TVs. Everything Costco had was over \$1,000. They’re in the back of the pickup.”

“I’ll put them in the storage building. There weren’t many orders to pack so I took the time to run the cables. Rob helped. I didn’t connect the cables to the switch and I didn’t put the satellite receivers in their rooms; I just ran the cables. After I get the TVs put away, I run the order to UPS.”

“What did the kids do today?”

“Rob helped me and Sam watched TV all day.”

“I’m going to lay down the rules after dinner.”

“Rules? When did you have time to come up with rules?”

“I had plenty of time to think about it going and coming. Nothing spectacular. They’re going to help us in the business and that will earn them an allowance. I think daily bathing is in order, too. Sam can learn to help me in the kitchen and Rob can help you when you get firewood.”

“I’ll be back in about an hour. The kids are both in the living room.”

◦

“Supper ok?”

“Whatever.”

“I think this would be a good time to explain the rules around here.”

“What took you so long?”

“Do you have anything to say, Rob?”

“No ma’am.”

“Rule one: everyone is expected to shower or bath daily, no exceptions.”

“Rule two: Sam will learn to cook and help me in the kitchen; Rob will help Tom gather firewood. Those were your chores and in addition to those things, you’ll be expected to keep your rooms clean. That will happen every day.”

“Rule three: you will work with us in the business, mostly packing shipments. For this you will be paid an allowance which you are free to spend, within reason.”

“Rule four: you will do home school every evening during the school year. Tom and I will both be available to help with your lessons.”

“Finally: Tom and I have decided that you can have internet access and perhaps a TV in your rooms, but only when you’ve earned them. We have satellite receivers and I bought new TVs today. Tom wired both of your rooms for Internet and TV. From now on, it’s up to you when you will receive them.”

“What do you have, dialup?”

“We did, but with the business to support the expense, we have a T-1 line. That’s like a synchronous DSL line, 1.544mbits both ways.”

“When do we get to go online?”

“When you earn the privilege.”

“I have rights.”

“That’s right, Sam you do. You have the right to express yourself and to be fed and clothed. You have the right to be free from danger. Anything after that is a privilege.”

“Let’s go to my room Robbie.”

“Samantha, I’m not going anywhere. That’s fair. We can earn allowances that we get to keep. The food tastes good and we have enough to eat, not like before. Nobody has threatened to beat us up again. You do what you want; I’m going to give it a try.”

Sam left the table and shortly thereafter, April followed.

“Sam, I picked some personal items up for you at the store. I put them in the bathroom. Won’t you at least give it a try? I’ll make the meals, but sometimes it would be nice to have someone to peel potatoes and dry the dishes.”

“I’d like to be able to send emails to some of my friends.”

“I’ll talk to Tom about setting you and Robbie each an email account. But for now, you’ll have to access them on the computer in the den.”

“Who do you have your Internet through?”

“SBC.”

“I have an SBC email account; you don’t need to set one up. Do you suppose I could check my mail?”

“Tom will set up your account and password. You’ll have to give him the information. You can download your emails, print them out and erase them.”

“Print them so you can read them?”

“I didn’t say that. Print them so you have a copy and we don’t.”

“Oh. That would be ok. My user ID is Sammy007@sbcglobal.net. My password is rottenparents.”

“I’ll have Tom set it up and you can check you emails later this evening.”

“I’ll dry the dishes.”

“Thanks.”

◦

Rob and Tom were playing Monopoly and Rob was winning. Sam helped April with dishes and Tom set up an email account on the office computer in the den. He even re-

loaded the printer so that Sam could print out her emails. The first thing Sam did was to change her password, both on the computer and at the SBC website.

A Family Alone – Chapter 6 – Adjusting

Sam got her emails, printed them out and erased the files. April and Tom used Internet Explorer and Outlook Express. The mail program wasn't preset to erase the messages when you exited and they remained in the deleted box. Generally, it fell to April to clear out the deleted box. She generally scanned the deleted box before she did so. She saw some of Sam messages and was going to ignore them; however, one subject line caught her eye and she read the message.

"Those were her private emails, April, you shouldn't have read it."

"I know. But the subject line said 'escape plan'."

"What's she going to do, walk off and have someone pick her up?"

"That's the plan, Tom."

"People who don't know this area will have a hard time finding the road. It's not on any map. Remember how much trouble the social worker from DCFS had? She came in the daytime and had to ask."

"What are we going to do?"

"I'll take care of it, when is she escaping?"

"Tomorrow night. She's supposed to meet them a mile from the house around 2am."

"No problem, I'll handle it. Did you erase the emails?"

"Yes."

"Please don't do that again, honey. How would you like for her to read your emails?"

Tom reset Outlook Express to automatically empty the deleted box when the program was exited. The following evening, he left before midnight and drove the five miles to where the road entered route 41. Originally the road had been a private road, but the previous owner had given it to the State so they could maintain it. Tom closed the old gates that the state had never taken down. Next he sat and waited until a car had passed by a couple of times obviously looking for the road. When it didn't come back in an hour, Tom opened the gates and headed back to the house. Sam was sitting on a duffel bag waiting for her friends.

"I don't think they'll be coming Sam, they couldn't find the road."

"What did you do, stop them? How did you know they were coming?"

“I didn’t talk to anyone. We had a feeling that you might try and leave tonight. As I said, they won’t be coming. Please get in and I’ll take you home.”

“They said that they couldn’t find the road. I was positive that you’d run them off.”

“Sam, the road used to be a private road and many people overlook it.” (Especially when the gate is closed.)

“I’ll help April with dishes.”

“What did you do?” April asked later.

“I closed the gate. The boys in that car were about 18-19 years old and not exactly what I’d call clean cut.”

“Maybe it will end here.”

“We can hope. How are we going to reimburse the kids for helping with packing the orders?”

“How about a piece rate? I can charge a portion of their wages against the business and the rest can be an allowance from us.”

“How much per box?”

“I’ll give them the UPS discount. That should reflect the size of the order.”

o

“Hey, what gives? I know how many pieces I packed.”

“And now you know about withholding taxes, Sam.”

“I’m just a kid.”

“Tell it to Congress, Sam. You may not make enough to have to pay any taxes and you might get a refund next April.”

“What if we’re not here?”

“Well, you’ll have to file you own return and they’ll send the money to the address on the return. If Robbie and you are still here, our accountant will prepare your returns and the check will come to you here.”

“When do we get to go shopping?”

“Every Sunday afternoon after church. We attend Church in Fresno.”

“I don’t go to church.”

“That why you have the lovely new dresses, to look nice for Church.”

“What Church do you go to?”

“Grace Lutheran.”

“And we go shopping after?”

“We have lunch first and then shopping. What did you want to buy?”

“Maybe a CD?”

“Ok. Does Robbie want to buy something too?”

“He said that he wants to save up his money for a rifle.”

“What kind of rifle?”

“A .22 something.”

◦

“I heard that you’re saving you money for a rifle.”

“That’s right, I want a Winchester 9422 .22LR. They are going to stop making them. The Special Edition Legacy Tribute Model 9422 is a unique opportunity to own a rare, fine shooting .22 with elegant looks that will be admired for years to come. It resembles the centerfire Model 94, featuring a high-grade pistol grip walnut stock and forearm, carefully checkered. The deeply blued receiver is delicately engraved with a tribute to the 9422 and the traditional Winchester Horse and Rider.”

“I see. When do you think you’ll have enough money?”

“I don’t know, maybe a year or so.”

“Ok. A good goal to shoot for.” (No pun intended.)

◦

“What does he want?”

“A Winchester 9422. By the time he has enough money, you won’t be able to buy them.”

“He’ll be awfully disappointed.”

“No he won’t. I’ve always had a hankering to have one too. How about you?”

“Uh, now that you mention it, sure. I’ll bet Sam wants one too.”

“I wonder if I can get a discount.”

◦

“Discount? They’re hard to get, Tom. Maybe I can get you 4, but I won’t promise. MSRP is \$551. I let you have them for \$500 if I can get 4.”

“This is important. What about the previous models?”

“Same difference.”

“Work on it would you? I need at least one.”

“One I have in stock.”

“I’ll take it, but try and get me 3 more, ok?”

“This for you?”

“Christmas or birthday present for the boy we have living with us.”

“I have a sale on 40gr solid points, \$7.95 a brick.”

“Give me a couple of cases, ok?”

“20 bricks? There won’t be a squirrel alive in the western Sierra Nevada’s.”

“On the other 3 Winchesters, either model will do.”

“Why didn’t you say so? I have 3 of the regular models in stock. Here, start filling out the paperwork.”

◦

“Well?”

“He had one of the Legacy’s and 3 of the regular models. I got the 4 rifles and 20 bricks of solid point.”

“When are you going to give it to him?”

“When is his 12th birthday?”

“The day after Thanksgiving, November 25th.”

“I think maybe we can give it to him for Christmas. We’ll give Sam her TV for Christmas. On his birthday, we’ll give him the TV and Sam a rifle. That will keep it even.”

“Ok, but I wouldn’t give her ammo until Christmas.”

“You have a point. Ok he gets the rifle and she gets the TV on his birthday and the other way around on Christmas. Find out what she likes for CDs and we’ll get her some of those for Christmas too.”

“They’re both growing, so clothes will be included. What do you want for Christmas?”

“Peace in the Middle East.”

“I can’t buy that in a store, give me some ideas.”

“Give me the Winchester, I bought. What do you want for Christmas?”

“How about a sewing machine?”

“What model?”

“A White 1730. It’s called their Quilt’N Sew model. It has a full size powerful motor. Watch the sales, you can save a bundle.”

“I’ll give you a rifle too. How is Sam adjusting?”

“I don’t think it’s time to put in the adoption papers. She’s conforming, but she is doing it out of obligation rather than because it’s what she wants to do.”

“That’s something at least. I don’t get that feeling from Rob.”

“Rob is 2 years younger and isn’t beset by raging hormones. I was hoping Sam would find one of the boys at Church that she wanted to be friends with.”

“No Latino gangsta’s, April.”

A Family Alone – Chapter 7 – One Down and One to Go

April fixed a small Butterball and all the trimmings for Thanksgiving dinner. There was an air of excitement in the air because Robbie's birthday was the following day. April had taken Sam with her the last time she'd gone to Fresno and they'd picked out some new clothes for Rob. Sam bought Rob 2 CD's, one of one her favorite artists and one that Rob might like. The following day, Robbie was up at the crack of dawn.

"Happy birthday, Robbie. What would you like for breakfast? It's your birthday so I suppose you can have anything you want."

"Oatmeal ok?"

"I'll fix some for everyone."

"What's wrong with Sam?"

"I didn't know there was anything wrong with Sam."

"She got an email and has been really upset ever since."

"Did you ask her? She's more likely to tell you than us."

"She bit my head off. She acts scared."

"I'll talk to her about it later."

Rob had to wait until after dinner to get his presents. April tried to talk to Sam, but she wouldn't answer April's questions about what was wrong. April had to agree with Robbie's assessment Sam was frightened of something. She mentioned it to Tom, but Sam had automatically erased the email when she'd exited Outlook Express. Tom also talked to Sam but she wouldn't say anything. She was very happy to finally have a TV of her own, but didn't even turn it on. Robbie was beside himself when he saw the Winchester rifle. Tom gave Rob the usual lecture about it not being a toy, etc. He told Rob that if the weather held, they could shoot the next day.

The kids had been approved for home schooling, mostly because of the location. The bus driver with the route said he wasn't taking his bus down that 'lane' during the winter. They got all of the books and the school set up the appointments of when the monitor would come by and check on their progress and answer questions. She also administered the tests. She came once a week and seemed satisfied with the kids progress. They both passed the tests she gave, surprising her.

"Home schooling is usually a last resort for kids who are having trouble in school. These two seem to be doing fine."

“We would have rather had them in school, but when it snows, the road is closed for several days at a time. If we get a bad ice storm, we sometimes lose power and the phone.”

“What do you do when that happens?”

“Cell phone and a standby generator. It’s more of an inconvenience than anything else.”

“What about going to the store for things you need?”

“If we don’t have it, we go without. That isn’t likely to happen, living in the country a person learns to be prepared to live with a few inconveniences. We have a freezer and shop at Costco. I bake our bread anyway.”

“Is that a wood stove?”

“Best thing there is to bake bread in, once you learn how much wood you need. Once the loaves begin their final rise, I build a fire and once they’re ready to go in, I don’t have to come back and check the oven again. It takes getting used to, but it’s handy. Tom had me pick up a used commercial bread slicer and our bread is just like what we’d get in a store, only better.”

“Samantha hasn’t fully adjusted, has she?”

“Not yet, but she’s a lot better than when they came this past spring.”

“When will she be 14?”

“January 8th.”

“I looked into her background as far as schooling goes, April. Samantha is way above average smart, but she doesn’t apply herself.”

“Absent mother and a drunk for a father. There were problems in their home.”

“I read the file. He got convicted and sentenced to 5 years.”

“We hadn’t followed the case and the social worker didn’t mention it.”

“He’s not in prison, you know. He walked away from a work party and they’re looking for him.”

“I didn’t know and I wonder why the DCFS didn’t warn us. Maybe that explains why Sam is so upset lately.”

“What do you mean?”

“On the day after Thanksgiving, Robbie mentioned that Sam had gotten an email and was very upset, even frightened. I talked to her, so did Tom, but she wouldn’t say anything. We both agreed that she was frightened and holding something back.”

“You might want to talk to your husband about this.”

◦

“Tom, the teacher who comes by to check on the kids and give them their tests mentioned today that their father escaped and is on the loose. Perhaps that explains why Sam is so upset. I really think we ought to make her show us the email.”

“It shouldn’t be a problem; he wouldn’t know where to look for them. But if he knew to send her an email, maybe he can find out.”

“He’d probably think they’re in Fresno County.”

“Yes, and City of Fresno is pushing a million people. I suppose I should talk to the Sheriff down in Madera. Why don’t you contact DCFS tomorrow and find out what you can?”

“Sam, did you get an email from your father?”

“How did you know?”

“We were guessing. We heard that he escaped and is on the loose. I don’t want to pry, but could you show us the email?”

“Do I have to?”

“No you don’t, Sam,” Tom replied. “However, it’s our responsibility to protect you now. That would be easier to do if we had the email.”

“I’ll get it.”

◦

“Here you go.”

“Jesus H. Christ. Excuse my language. He’s sick.”

“Let me see that, Tom. Oh, my!”

“Would you mind if April slept with you in the trundle bed?”

“It’s ok.”

“May I keep this email to show to the Sheriff?”

“I guess it would be ok.”

“Why didn’t you tell us sooner Sam? We can protect you. Even if your father could figure out where Robbie and you were, he wouldn’t be able to harm you.”

“Am I in trouble?”

“Whatever for? For being scared? No way. April will sleep with you until we can resolve this situation. She’ll talk to DCFS tomorrow and I’ll talk to the Sheriff.”

“April, get your piece out of the cabinet, just in case. I’ll get mine too. What we need is a dog. There isn’t time to get one either. I look into that tomorrow in Fresno, after I talk to the Sheriff.”

o

It was questionable if Tom slept at all that night, the Monday after Thanksgiving. He left the first thing in the morning to see Sheriff John P. Anderson or one of his Deputies. Madera County has a large child protection program run by the Sheriff’s Department. Tom got to talk with a Detective Martin.

“When did she get this email?”

“The date is on the top. I think a day or two before Thanksgiving. We just found out about the escape yesterday. Sam gave us the email last night. My wife April is sleeping with her until this matter is resolved.”

“Won’t that just be putting them both in harm’s way?”

“April’s armed.”

“You can’t shoot the SOB unless he’s armed too. You know California law, you have to retreat.”

“What can you do?”

“We can increase patrols in the area and we can put out an advisory, but other than that, there isn’t a lot we can do.”

“But, if he’s armed?”

“Shoot the SOB, no one will blame you. Have you considered the additional trauma on the kids?”

“Robbie doesn’t know why Sam is upset. April has a call into DCFS this morning to find out why they didn’t let us know he escaped.”

“The Fresno office of DCFS?”

“Yes.”

“They had a break in overnight. They claim that several files were gone through but that nothing was missing.”

“You might want to have Fresno PD follow up on that and especially check for any files pertaining to the kids.”

“I’ll give them a call.”

“Where can I get a guard dog?”

“Get a hold of the San Joaquin Valley German Shepherd Dog Club, Inc. Talk to a guy named Mike Martinez, 4430 E. Floradora Ave. in Fresno. He can probably answer all of your questions.”

“Thanks, how often will you patrol?”

“As many times as we can, but that probably won’t be enough to satisfy you will it Mr. Henson?”

“You do what you have to detective and I’ll do what I have to.”

“Mind you don’t break any laws in the process.”

“Yes sir.”

◦

“Are you Mike Martinez? My name is Tom Henson and I was referred to you by a Detective Martin in the Madera County Sheriff’s Department.”

“I’m Mike Martinez, what can I do for you?”

A Family Alone – Chapter 8 – Grrrrr

“I need a guard dog for a while, with or without handler. I’m also looking for a German Shepherd puppy that would make a good pet for my daughter. She’s a foster child that my wife and I are thinking of adopting. Her father was convicted of child molestation but escaped from jail. He’s sent her a threatening email.”

“I can refer you to a company that provides guard dogs and handlers. I can also refer you to a breeder that has a 15-month-old German Shepherd for sale. The dog won’t be cheap, but he’s trained.”

“Give me the names and addresses.”

“The top name is the Guard Service. The other name is the breeder. Good Luck.”

“Thanks.”

“Are you the fella with a German Shepherd for sale? I was given your name by Mike Martinez.”

“Mr. Henson? Mike called. I still have the dog. He fully trained. Mike said that he referred you to a Guard Service, too. They’re fairly expensive. However, Champion would alert and give you plenty of warning. I can let you have him for \$1,250. He doesn’t have show potential, however he would make an excellent family pet.”

“That’s a lot of money for a dog.”

“If he had show potential I’d be asking twice as much. He’s fully guaranteed so far as his health goes.”

“Ok, sold. What do I feed him?”

“I give you a bag of feed to get him started. You can pick up more of the same thing at Wal-Mart or a pet store.”

“His name is Champion?”

“Right, but he goes by Champ.”

“I’ll take him.”

“I assure you, you won’t be disappointed Mr. Henson”

◦

“Sam you just became the mother of a 90 pound German Shepherd. His legal name is Champion, but he goes by Champ. He’ll go to the door and bark if he needs to be let out. Champ will sleep with April and you. April, what did you find out from DCFS?”

“Not much. Their office was ransacked but they don’t think that whoever it was had anything to do with Sam and Robbie.”

“That Detective with the Madera County Sheriff seemed to think differently and has contacted the Fresno PD. This dog I got Sam is a guard dog. He’ll let you know if we have an intruder. If he growls, you wake me and call the Sheriff. They should have a patrol in the general area.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Never mind, I take care of my end. If I tell you, you’ll be compromised.”

o

Tom had a Saturday night special (SNS) and an old beat up but serviceable Colt Detective’s Special. He thought about it and got out the Colt. It still had the ammo in it that it had when he’d gotten the gun in a poker game years before. The SNS was a .38. Over the course of the next two nights, nothing happened. On the third night, sometime after midnight, Champ alerted. April woke Tom and he got his M1911 and the throw down gun. April called the Sheriff, but the patrol would take at least 15 minutes and more likely 20 minutes to arrive, even at Code 3. Tom slipped out of the house, with Champ on a leash at his side.

Champ alerted and strain at the leash. Tom let Champ advance slowly. He had the dog in one hand, with his flashlight and his gun in his other. He saw man and called out, “Who goes there?” The reply was, “I have a gun.”

Tom shot the SOB. The man had been bluffing – he didn’t have a gun. Tom could hear the siren approaching. He got out the Detective’s special and pressed the gun into the man’s hand and then fired one round. The car pulled in about 3 minutes later. Tom and Champ were waiting.

“He’s over there. I challenged him and he said he had a gun. He shot and I returned fire.”

“Please let me have your weapon.”

“Help yourself Deputy. Champ, heel.”

“We heard that you got a guard dog.”

"This guy is dead, one round through the heart. I'll call it in and call for the Medical Examiner (Also the Sheriff). Can we go into the house?"

"Sure, I'll have April put on a pot of coffee. Do you know the guy?"

"He fits the general description of the kids' father. He didn't have a wallet."

"Am I under arrest?"

"Not at the moment, that will be the Detective's call. I'll have to keep your gun for now."

"Sure, we have more. April, could you put on a pot of coffee? Sam, Champ will stay with you."

"Thanks for the coffee. It's been a long night. When you called we were out of position. Sorry we couldn't get here sooner."

"Yeah, me too."

"Did you shoot someone, Tom?"

"Deputy, this is our foster child, Samantha. She's the one who got the threatening email."

"Samantha the man may have been your father. He didn't have any identification."

"I can identify him."

"We'd better wait for the Detectives and the Medical Examiner," the Deputy advised.

"So what's next?" Tom asked.

"I'm afraid we wait Mr. Henson."

o

"Mrs. Henson, could you tell my partner what happened?"

"Mr. Henson, the Deputy retrieved a revolver from the man you shot. Can you tell me what happened?"

"We got a German Shepherd from a breeder that Mike Martinez recommended. Tonight, he alerted and April called your office. I got my pistol and the dog and I went outside. Champ alerted again and I let him lead me to whatever alerted him. The man saw us approach and said he had a gun. He fired one round. I shot him and went to check him. He appeared to be dead. You're patrol car arrived a few minutes later. They took my

pistol and checked on the guy. They called in and asked me to come into the house. We had coffee while we waited for you to arrive.”

“Ok. I’ll need you to prepare a hand written statement. While you’re doing that, I have a word with my partner and your wife. There won’t be any need for Samantha to identify the body. The man you shot was, in fact, her father. I’ve ID’d him from his mug shot and we’ll take prints at the autopsy. Please use these forms for your written statement. You’ll need to fill out your statement in ink. If you make an error, draw a line through it and continue. The Deputy will remain with you while you fill out the statement.”

“Ryan, he admits shooting the guy. What does the wife say?”

“The wife says that the dog alerted and her husband and the dog went outside while she called us. She heard two shots, moments apart.”

“Ok, get her written statement and I’ll talk to the daughter.”

“Samantha, I’m Detective Martin. I sorry about what happened tonight. The man outside was your father. What can you tell me about what happened?”

“It all started last week when I got the email. I didn’t say anything to anybody. They asked, but I didn’t tell. Monday night they told me that they knew my father had escaped and asked to see the email. I let them look at it and gave them permission to show it to the Sheriff. April slept with me Monday night and I heard Tom up most of the night. Anyway, Tuesday morning, Tom went to see the Sheriff and April called the DCFS. When Tom came home Tuesday, he had Champ to protect me. Nothing happened for two nights. Tonight, late, I don’t know the time, Champ growled and April went to Tom. Then she called 911. Tom got his gun and when outside with the dog. I heard Tom ask who was there or something like that and my dad said he had a gun. Then there were two shots fairly close together and the Deputies showed up. Can I go now?”

“Did you talk to Tom between the time you heard the shots and before we got here?”

“He didn’t come back into the house until the Deputies brought him in.”

“What did you and April talk about?”

“We didn’t talk.”

“Ok, can you put that all in writing for me?”

“Can I use my computer?”

“I’m sorry Samantha, but it has to be handwritten.”

"If they didn't have a chance to talk before we arrived, it appears to be open and shut. Foster father kills rapist who fired at him first."

"If that's the way it happened," the Deputy replied.

"Do you have any proof it didn't happen just that way?"

"Proof? No, but I think the interval between the shots was more than a moment."

"How much longer?"

"Maybe a few seconds."

"Is it possible that Mr. Henson held his fire until he had a clear shot?"

"I suppose it's possible."

"Did you time the interval?"

"No, I was coming down that road 70 miles an hour."

"We have a good guy protecting his family. The bad guy had a gun. The bad guy was an escaped felon who had been convicted of molesting his daughter. He sent her a threatening email. The foster father hesitated to shoot while he decided whether we'd arrive in time and worried about the effect it might have on his foster daughter. Doesn't that about sum it up?"

"Yeah, I suppose."

"Ok, we'll write it up and run it by the DA, but I don't think there will be any prosecution. Are you good with that?"

"I can live with a scum ball molester being off the street."

"I'll need your report tonight when you get off shift."

"Frigin paperwork."

"Mr. Henson. For the moment, we're not going to arrest you. I'll run this by the DA tomorrow and if he agrees, this case is closed. Your pistol will be returned to you after that."

"Fine. He's not the first man I ever had to kill."

"Who else?"

“Damned if I know, some Iraqi during Desert Storm. And, in that case, I shot first. Any chance I could get to bed now?”

A Family Alone – Chapter 9 – Justifiable Homicide

The California Penal Code allows a defense of 'self-defense'. If the DA is convinced that the evidence supports such a conclusion, charges are not always brought. The California Court system has a terrible backlog. Charges are brought if there is any doubt and it is left to a jury to determine if the homicide was justifiable. There may be a difference between morally justified and legally justified. In this instance the DA decided that there wasn't a sufficient question to justify a trial. That decision rested on the fact that the deceased had gunshot residue on his hand and no one made a statement contradicting Tom's statement. I told you how it really happened, but if I hadn't, would you have believed Tom? I think under the circumstances, I would have.

Testing for gunshot residue is better suited for some things than others. It is basically a test for the presence of nitrates. Tom admitted firing his gun, so he would naturally have gunshot residue on his hands. Gunshot residue on the deceased man's hand confirmed that he had fired a gun. It wouldn't tell you when that occurred. Which is better, to be morally right or legally right?

Samantha wasn't upset at the death of her father and Robbie apparently had already written him off. While Robbie hadn't been molested, he'd taken a few beatings when his father had been drunk. If an escaped felon tells you he has a gun, it is prudent to believe him and protect your family. The world wouldn't miss one more child molester. And, Tom had given him a chance to surrender, more or less.

◦

Things began to change in the household. Sam felt safer. When she got the rifle for Christmas, she felt even more secure. April and Tom would spend long hours on the range during the spring teaching the kids gun safety and how to shoot. There are all manner of things a person has to be prepared for. Unfortunately this may include shooting someone who is attempting to harm your family. Just be sure you shoot straight... You don't need a live witness to contradict you.

◦

"Can I keep saving my money?"

"If you want to. What are you saving up for now?"

"Another rifle. I'm getting close, too. I only need about another \$150."

"What kind of gun are you going to buy this time?"

"A Winchester."

"Robbie, you have a Winchester."

“Not in .45 Colt I don’t.”

“And after you have that rifle, what then?”

“Then I start saving up for a Ruger Vaquero.”

“Planning on being a cowboy when you grow up?”

“I don’t know what I’m going to do when I grow up, but I’ll have a bunch of guns. Can we stay here?”

“That’s going to be up to your sister.”

“Oh good, we get to stay.”

“Why would you think that?”

“Sam called April Mom, but I’m not supposed to repeat it.”

“I can keep a secret, you know.”

“Ok, but don’t tell Mom.”

o

By spring of 2006, Robbie had the money for the Winchester rifle. Tom had to buy it for him and so far as a revolver went, you had to be 21 to buy a handgun. Thinking ahead, perhaps, Tom bought 4 Winchester Legacy model 94s in .45 Colt and 4 Ruger Original Vaqueros, also in .45 Colt. He opted to buy all 4 handguns with 5½” barrels. The problem with buying firearms in early 2006 was that by the time you got the money for something you wanted, it was no longer available. When it came time for Robbie to pay Tom for the rifle, Tom took the money. He immediately went to the coin shop in Fresno and converted the money Robbie gave him into silver coins. He wrote Robbie’s name on the rolls and added them to his safe along with the other gold and silver.

Eventually, Sam took a turn with Robbie’s new rifle and produced the money to buy her own. Tom repeated the process with her money and put her silver coins in his safe. The price of silver hadn’t changed so both kids had the same amount of silver. Tom also gave April the Winchester and took the one he bought for himself. During the summer, Robbie and Tom went to the area over by Mammoth Mountain and they harvested about 10 cords of the dead wood that the high concentrations of carbon dioxide had killed. Long Valley continued to be quiet and the largest earthquake during the year 2005 had been a M 2.9.

That left Sam and April to run the business. Which of course created an inequity in the kids' allowances. To make up for it, when the firewood was split and put away, Sam helped Tom in the garden and Rob helped April pack the boxes. Almost a year to the day after the kids had come to live with Tom and April; Sam broached the question of adoption with April. They had a family meeting and decided that if both kids were certain, they'd talk to DCFS and get the ball rolling. Sam was still having a problem with the Mom and Dad stuff, but Rob was a trooper by this time, using the labels freely. This year, they were low on spaghetti sauce again so they planted 15 Roma tomato plants and put up both tomato sauce and extra spaghetti sauce. The garden was simply larger with 4 instead of two mouths to feed.

The neighbor down the road who also had a 3,000-gallon(net) propane tank came by one day and told Tom and April that he and the wife were retiring and moving to town. He wondered if Tom might be interested in buying his propane tank. They discussed a price and Tom checked tank prices on the Internet before completing the deal. Even with the cost of moving the tank and replacing the relief valve, Tom and April were getting a very good deal on the tank. They also bought some of the other fellow's things that he was planning on selling at his farm sale, including a propane burning stove, a propane powered refrigerator and a full set of cast iron pots and pans. All of these things went into the shelter, with considerable effort. Once the tank was installed and the valve replaced, they filled it with a 3,000-gallons of propane, the same as their other tank.

When Tom's pickup finally bit the dust, he scraped it after removing the aftermarket fuel tank. This he installed in a diesel powered Dodge 3500. Since the truck was used in the business a portion of the time, they put it in the name of the Corporation. Tom and April kept a vehicle log detaining business and personal use at the suggestion of the accountant. It was an expensive pickup, with nearly every option available. It had the crew cab, automatic transmission, a 12k Warn winch, bed liner, etc. Instead of the CD/tape/radio player, Tom went with an AM/FM radio and added a Kenwood TS-2000 radio, the only difference being the microphone. He had more antennas on his Dodge than a typical police car. He also added a second alternator and second battery just to power the radio. It was the same setup he had in the shelter except with mobile antennas and hand held mike.

◦

"The fire hazard is pretty high again this year; I'm going to clear all of the timber off the rest of the acreage. Sam can tend the garden, Rob can help you and I'll make firewood. If I harvest any hardwood, maybe we can sell it for veneer."

"You'll be cutting timber until the snow falls."

"Maybe, but I'm going to clear it all off."

"You wouldn't have to clear the entire 40 acres, would you?"

“I was thinking about converting it to pasture.”

“Pasture for what?”

“Maybe a beef or maybe horses, I haven’t decided.”

“Why don’t you leave the Black Oaks in to provide shade for the livestock you want to get? There are only a few trees. Or, did you intend to farm the ground?”

“I’m not a farmer. Good suggestion, it might prevent erosion. I won’t have to cut firewood for a long time, once I get the land cleared.”

“You won’t get it all cleared this year, will you?”

“I wish. No, honey probably this year and all of next year. I’m going to remove the stumps as I go. I read about drilling holes in the stumps and adding 45-0-0 fertilizer to accelerate the rotting process.”

“Hand drill?”

“No, I put the generator on the pickup remember?”

“It was a gas generator and the pickup is diesel.”

“I traded generators, used for used. I put in a 5.5kw diesel and an electric fuel pump. Got a pretty good deal.”

“Sometimes you act like we’re made of money.”

“Is there a problem?”

“Not at the moment, no. We have two growing children that eat like they haven’t eaten in a month every time they sit down at the table. That makes them grow and they’re out of their clothes before they’re worn out.”

“The joys of parenthood. At least we missed the diapers. I’ll let you know before I spend over \$500 on anything, although, I can’t imagine what I might buy.”

“I can. You have a diesel pickup but you only have a 500-gallon gasoline tank. Don’t you think we’d better put in a diesel tank?”

“I hadn’t given it any thought.”

“I checked with the dealer. Our choices are a stand tank like we have for gas or an underground tank. The dealer strongly recommended that we put in a new divided under-

ground tank because of the fire danger. He said that there are some incentives at the moment and that he'd give us a trade in on our old gas tank, provided it isn't rusted."

"Can we manage it?"

"As long as we don't completely fill the diesel tank, yes."

"I suppose we'd better, huh?"

"You start cutting trees and I'll work it out with the dealer."

o

The summer of 2006 was long and hot. April worked with the dealer and they had a single pump that pumped gas or diesel. It was a used pump from a gas station. The tank was a new fiberglass tank that met all of the state's requirements. In addition to the mail order business, she and the kids went to several garden shows, etc. to sell Watkins products. Tom busied himself cutting down the pine trees, starting around the house and moving into the 'field'. He left all of the California Black Oak trees standing. They talked it over and he bought a used hydraulic splitter for the firewood. He still had to split kindling by hand, but it didn't amount to much. With the late fall, Tom ended up with half of the 40 acres cleared.

"We have a court hearing on the adoption scheduled for October 13th."

"Ok. How much diesel fuel did you end up with in the tank?"

"Two thousand gallons and I added a gallon of PRI-D."

"What's the capacity of the new tank?"

"Each section holds 4,500 gallons. I thought maybe we'd use 3 for diesel and one for gas. However, the pump has three positions so we could have 3 different types of fuel if we wanted."

"I can't think of what we'd need besides diesel and gas."

"Neither can I, but we have the option. How much wood did you end up cutting, splitting and stacking?"

"I have no idea. A lot."

"Are you going to be able to finish clearing the acreage next year?"

"I don't think so. I probably won't be done until the summer of 2008. When I'm done, I want to fence the 40 acres so we can have livestock."

A Family Alone – Chapter 10 – Clearing the Land

“Won’t we need a barn, too?”

“Not until I get the fence up.”

“Next year why don’t you get Rob to help you and Sam and I’ll run the business?”

“We could maybe do that. But Rob wouldn’t earn an allowance.”

“Sell a few loads of firewood and give him the money.”

“April, I could sell 200 cords and still have a huge pile.”

“You could sell firewood all winter, couldn’t you?”

“As long as the roads stayed open. I could use the trailer and in 100 days of hard work sell off the 200 cords.”

“What’s it worth?”

“Delivered and stacked, \$175 a cord.”

“Darn, that’s \$35,000.”

“Less expenses. I could probably net \$150 a cord.”

“Could you get a barn put in for \$30,000?”

“For sure I could buy a big prefab and have it installed.”

“Which means that come spring you could get a barn built, right?”

“If we sell enough firewood.”

“I’ll put an ad in the paper and post a note on the website.”

“Ok. But Sam and you are going to have to take the orders.”

“I’m going to talk to SBC and have them use a portion of our T-1 line for phone service. That should solve our phone problem once and for all.”

“The good news is that with all of the exercise, my knee is better. The bad news is that I’m exhausted.”

“Have you decided on horses and cattle?”

“No. I haven’t decided on either. We can’t really do anything until the land is cleared and the fence put up. I checked on the fencing and a 4-rail horse fence would cost about \$18,000 plus installation.”

“Why couldn’t you work around the property edges this coming summer? That would clear the space for the fence and if you sold another 200 cords next year the fence would be paid for.”

“So, you have it all figured out. Winter 2006-2007 we sell wood; spring of 2007 we install a barn; summer of 2007 we cut wood; winter of 2007-2008 we sell wood; spring of 2008 we install fence; and, the summer of 2008 we finish clearing pasture.”

“That sounds about right.”

“When do I get to rest?”

“There will be plenty of time to rest when you’re dead.”

“With the schedule you have worked out for me for the next couple of years, it might be sooner than you think.”

“Oh pooh. The exercise is good for you. You’re looking fitter now than at any time since you got out of the Army.”

“You know, if we clear a little extra money on the firewood we might be able to put more fuel in our new underground tank.”

“That would be good. Anxious to get that done?”

“Filling the tanks? It doesn’t seem that the price of gas or diesel is going down.”

“Why don’t you have Rob drill the stumps next summer and you fell the trees? It might be easier for him to do one thing and you the other.”

“Good idea. I’d rather not have him handling a chainsaw for another couple of years.”

o

Over the course of the winter, they sold, delivered and stacked 250 cords of firewood at \$175 a cord netting a cool \$37,500. Tom paid Rob minimum wage and had enough left come spring to put in a Castlebrook Barns Raised Center Aisle 8 stall horse barn on a concrete slab. He had the barn oriented to permit them to install flexible thin film PV roofing. The barn ran north and south and both sides of the roof had the thin film. The eastern roof caught the morning sun and the western side the afternoon sun. With all of the projects for 2007, they didn’t bother with a garden.

During the long summer of 2007, Rob and Tom managed to clear the remaining 20 acres and drill the ground level stumps. The winter of 2007, they sold another 250 cords of wood and come spring of 2008, had the fence installed. The fence came through a company in San Jose, A Wholesale Fence Company. It was a 54" high, heavy-duty, 4-rail vinyl fence with posts 8' on center. At the front of the property, next to the road, Tom left in pines 3 layers deep and the fence went behind the trees and another stretch of fence divided the front and back of the property. There was enough firewood left over to last several years.

The prefabricated barn was even insulated. They picked up a feeder to have some beef and went looking for horses. They bought western saddle horses instead of any pure-bred lines. On the 25th of November 2008, Rob turned 15. Tom and April talked it over and they finally let Rob have the Vaquero that Tom had bought back in the spring of 2006 and put up. And, of course, for Christmas Samantha got her revolver. Both kids were doing fabulous in school. Sam was in 11th grade and Rob in 9th, and they were still being home schooled. Sam had lost her 'Whatever' attitude somewhere along the way and she had met a young man at the Church, Garry Owens.

Time flies when you're busy. Samantha had pretty much reached her full growth too, so it was easier buying her clothing. Rob was still growing like a weed and he looked to go 6' by the time he was done. Dave had contacted Tom during the fall of 2008 and he had some more of the M1As and M16s. Tom added one M1A Loaded, one M16A3, one 12-gauge and one 20-gauge Saiga. The only thing missing to allow everyone to have nearly identical guns was Colt autos for the kids. Tom had them, but they were put up for the next birthdays.

For her birthday in January of 2008, Sam had wanted dresses for Church. However, both Tom and April suspected that it was to keep young Mr. Owens' attention firmly glued to Sam. Not that anything needed to be done to guarantee that. Rob had discovered girls, but if he had his choice between dating and riding or shooting, the girls lost out.

◦

"At least Rob and I won't have to battle the roads delivering firewood this year."

"How much do we use?"

"About 5 cords a year and I'd speculate that we have 75 cords. I suppose we could get more of the die off from Mammoth to keep our supply topped off."

"It's been 10-years since we bought the acreage. How about we take a vacation this year?"

"Where would you like to go April?"

“Anywhere except Fresno. How about somewhere out of state?”

“We could go see Yellowstone and the Black Hills.”

“That’s fine. June?”

“That will be okay. I’ll have to talk to Garry about taking care of the livestock and Champ. What about the Watkins orders?”

“They can pile up for a couple of weeks. I need a break.”

“Do you have any objections if I add a topper to the Dodge?”

“That might be a good idea. You have the portable generator in the back.”

“It’s bolted down.”

“Oh, I know, but it might be more secure. Do you want to take the car or the pickup?”

“The car is worn out honey. Jeep brought out that new Rescue last year. We could buy one of those for you.”

“Are they very expensive?”

“Very.”

“What about the Hummer’s?”

Up to \$150 thousand.”

“How about a long bed crew cab pickup with a diesel engine?”

“\$50 thousand.”

“That’s more like it.”

“Is that what you want to replace your car?”

“I think so, yes.”

“Do you need help picking it out?”

“It might be fun if I did it by myself.”

“Be my guest. This ought to be interesting.”

The only difference between Tom's pickup and April's pickup was that hers was 3 model years newer and a different color. It had all of the same accessories including the extra alternator and battery, Warn Winch, Kenwood TS-2000 radio and 6 antennas. One antenna was for the Am/Fm radio, one for the Cobra SSB CB, one for the CM 300 and the other three for the TS-2000. She had a topper, too and the 98-gallon cross-bed fuel tank. Plus the dealer had given her a Dodge cap.

"I thought you might buy something different."

"I did, it's a different color."

"At least it isn't flame red."

"They didn't have one in stock. Yours is mineral gray and mine is almond pearl."

"It looks tan to me. Why did you pick that color?"

"The dealer had the vehicle on his lot too long and I got a discount. He could have ordered the flame red, but it would have been full price."

"We'd better teach the kids to drive so they can get their licenses."

"Samantha already has her permit and Rob won't be old enough until his next birthday."

"I can still teach him to drive can't I?"

"You can teach Sam too. The car had an automatic and the pickup has a manual."

"I'll use my truck; the transmission is worn in better."

And after both Rob and Sam had learned to drive the pickup with the manual transmission, Tom had it rebuilt. The truck sounded more like a coffee grinder than a truck while the kids learned. After, it was fine. Fortunately manual transmissions are cheaper to rebuild than automatics. Tom also had the injectors cleaned professionally for the first time. The older pickup perked right up after that.

o

During June of 2009, the family took a road trip to Yellowstone and the Black Hills using April's pickup. They camped out most nights in parks along the way. Some nights when there wasn't a park available, they stayed in motels. Sam was on the phone the nights they were in motels and they were keeping up with the status of the livestock and Champ. On the way back, they detoured through Denver, Colorado and took I-70 to Beaver, Utah. Their last stop on this trip was Zion National Park, north and east of St.

George. They continued to Las Vegas on I-15 where they picked up US 95 to Tonopah. They took 6 to Benton, picked up 120 and returned home.

A Family Alone – Chapter 11 – Homecoming

“Did everyone enjoy the trip?”

“It was nice, thanks,” Rob replied.

“It sure is nice to be home,” Sam observed.

“I wonder if Garry remember to weed the garden?” April asked.

“Ask him, he’s standing on the front porch, just getting ready to knock.”

“Hi Garry did everything go ok?”

“Yes sir, Mr. Henson. I fed and watered the livestock, took care of Champ and weeded the garden.”

“Come into the den for a minute, Garry. I have something for you.”

“Yes sir.”

“Tell me Garry, what are you planning on doing when you graduate from high school?”

“Take a job in Fresno. We take special classes in shop so we can get a good job when we graduate.”

“What kind of job?”

“Mechanic, Mr. Henson, diesel engines.”

“Here a little something for your trouble. Thanks, Garry. Do you have an employer already?”

“Yes and no. Several of the shops in town that handle diesel engines hire the best kids in the class every spring after graduation. I don’t have a job yet, but I’m about 3rd in the class.”

“What are your intentions concerning Samantha?”

“I thought that once I got myself established and a place to live, I’d come speak to you about that.”

“Consider it done. April and I approve, provided you are gainfully employed and have a little something put away.”

“That’s still a year off.”

"I know Garry, but a fella sort of likes to know where he stands. Say was your dad in the Army?"

"Yes sir, 7th Cavalry."

"I sort of thought so. Your dad has a sense of humor."

o

"So your dad gave us permission after I'm out of high school and established."

"When will that be?"

"Oh, maybe a year. I need to have a place and have something put up so I can take care of you."

"That long? I have some money put away."

"Sam what's the hurry? We have our whole lives ahead of us."

"I just assumed that we'd get married when we graduated."

"You know I love you, it isn't that. But if I live at home after I start working, I can save most of my wages and get us a really nice place. It's not like you're going to be an old maid. We can get engaged."

"When?"

"When we graduate, in a year."

"And get married the year after?"

"Right, you want to be a June bride, don't you?"

"Yes, but June in a year, not two years."

"If I can't provide for you, we're going to be in trouble. I see all of those people getting married a week after graduation. Some of them are divorced a year later. It costs a lot to live. I help my mom with the grocery shopping. And there's rent on an apartment, utilities and all that stuff."

"Maybe I'll meet someone else and like them better."

"Better to find out before we're married than after."

◦

“You’d better have a talk with Sam honey. Garry is talking sense and she’s in too big of a hurry.”

“We got married right out of high school.”

“Yes, we did. And then I went into the Army. It was tough being away from you. I can’t imagine what it would have been like if I were single. Still, Garry is making sense, isn’t he?”

“I’ll talk to her. But I’m not sure what to say.”

“I’m sure you will think of something. You could point out that she’d have another year’s worth of earnings saved. That would make it easier on them when they get started out. It would also make it easier for us and Garry’s parents to help them get into a house after a while.”

◦

“I’m sorry Sam, but when Garry and you raised your voices, we couldn’t help but overhear.”

“So, you’re saying Garry is right and I’m wrong?”

“I am not. I’m saying that if you work for me for one year while Garry gets established, you’ll have a lot more money to start with. Tom and I got married out of high school, but we’d known each other since grade school. That first year was hard, with him being in basic training, AIT, etc. I know you love Garry and he obviously loves you very much or he wouldn’t be concerned about making sure the two of you get off on the right foot.”

“What if he meets someone else?”

“Afraid you’ll lose him?”

“Well...”

“If you lose him he isn’t worth having. I really don’t think that is going to happen. Or, are you afraid you’ll meet someone else?”

“My mom did.”

“After she was married, right?”

“Right.”

“Don’t you think it would be better if you had the chance to find out before you got married?”

“I guess so.”

“I think that Garry is a real winner and you are very lucky to have met him. He’s more interested in having you for a wife than as a bed warmer.”

“Oh, mom.”

◦

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“Did she listen?”

“I think so. At least I won’t have to make her a full partner for a year.”

“That might be a good idea. Setting her up in business as a Watkins dealer.”

“Do you really think so? I wonder why I didn’t think of that? Tom, I already have everything mapped out to start her up. It’s a good business for a stay at home mom. I just have to wait until they get married so I can get her the freshest products.”

“Have you always been one step ahead of me?”

“No. Not until the 5th grade.”

“I wonder what Rob is going to do when he gets out of high school?”

“We won’t have to worry about that for a while. But, I’d imagine that he’ll either go to college or go in the military.”

“Not if I can talk him out of it. I put in 12 years and that should cover Rob, you and me.”

“There aren’t any wars going on.”

“Not right now there aren’t; but, if the Republicans get the White House in 2012, watch out.”

“North Korea disarmed.”

“So they claim. The Iranians are strangely silent on the matter. And China bought those planes from the Russians that India wanted.”

“What did you mean by the Iranians being silent?”

“Iran bought 3 of the Kilos from Russia. They also bought several cruise missiles that were designed to carry nuclear warheads. So, if they were able to develop their own atomic warhead, Israel would be in trouble. The minute they launched against Israel, the Israelis would retaliate with their own nukes and the entire Middle East would explode.”

“There hasn’t been any talk like that for a long time.”

“Right, it makes you wonder what’s really going on.”

“What about our Navy?”

“They finished the last Nimitz class carrier, converted those 4 SSBN’s to SSGN’s and ordered several more Burke class DDGs. I think they have 13 ordered but none commissioned. I sort of quit following it.”

“Have you been keeping an eye on the San Andreas and the Long Valley Caldera?”

“Should I? They can’t predict earthquakes. And, we’ll get advance warning if Long Valley is going to erupt. Besides, they’re only talking about pyroclastic flows of 10 miles.”

“That was 600 years ago. How large were they when the caldera was formed?”

“What I read was that the ash cloud ascended about 25 miles. It was blown east by the prevailing winds. However, much of the ash that was discharged fell back into the caldera, filling it about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way full.”

“And if the wind is out of the east?”

“That’s why we have a shelter April.”

“What about Sam and Garry? What if it blows after they’ve gotten married?”

“Assuming they get married and assuming it erupts, we should have enough advance notice that they can come here. Garry’s family can come too.”

“What if it blows before they’re married?”

A Family Alone – Chapter 12 – A Seismic Event

“We’ll pronounce them man and wife and invite our new in-laws.”

“I wasn’t joking.”

“Neither was I.”

Seismology (from the Greek *seismos* = earthquake and *logos* = word) is the scientific study of earthquakes and the movement of waves through the Earth. The field also includes studies of variants such as seaquakes, causes such as volcanoes and tectonic plates. Earthquakes (and other earth movements) produce different types of seismic waves. These waves travel through rock, and provide an effective way to “see” events and structures deep in the Earth. It has long been noted that the 1964 earthquake in Alaska had a measurable effect on Yellowstone. Which just naturally leads to the question, *Would the Big One on the San Andreas Fault cause a problem in the Long Valley Caldera?*

The USGS regional office in Menlo Park, California, serves as headquarters for the Long Valley Observatory. Data from monitoring instruments located in and around the Long Valley Caldera are sent by radio and satellite telemetry to computers in Menlo Park where they are automatically processed in real time for immediate analysis by scientists. The computers include an automatic paging system that alerts scientists of significant changes in activity 24 hours a day. You didn’t think the seismologists would be dumb enough to stay in Long Valley, did you? It is 173 miles from Mammoth Lakes to Menlo Park.

Tremor is a seismic vibration, similar to a volcanic earthquake, but of longer duration and more continuous than earthquakes of the same amplitude. Volcanic tremor can last from minutes to days. It may be caused by magma moving through narrow cracks, boiling and pulsation of pressurized fluids within the volcano, or escape of pressurized steam and gases from fumaroles. A variety of earthquake types can occur at a volcano that is getting ready to erupt. These include earthquakes caused by rocks breaking along faults or fractures, termed tectonic-type earthquakes. Another common type is a long-period or volcanic earthquake. These can occur when bubble-filled magma is on the move beneath a volcano. The differences between tectonic-type and volcanic-type earthquakes are so subtle that they can be distinguished only by using seismometers.

Stronger earthquakes sometimes do occur near volcanoes as a result of tectonic faulting. For example, four magnitude 6 earthquakes struck Long Valley Caldera, California, in 1980, and a magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck Kilauea Volcano, Hawaii, in 1975. Both volcanoes were quiet at the time. The Hawaii earthquake triggered a small eruption at the summit of Kilauea. No eruption has yet occurred at Long Valley, but the area has been restless since the 1980 earthquakes. Half an answer is better than none – on the other hand, they didn’t say that an earthquake couldn’t cause a volcanic eruption, only that it didn’t. Semantics?

The Yellowstone Volcano Observatory is located in existing facilities at the University of Utah, Yellowstone National Park, and the USGS. The continuously recorded GPS data are telemetered via radio and satellite links to the University of Utah for recording and processing. The University of Utah is located in Salt Lake City, about 185 miles from Yellowstone. Apparently the death of geologist Dave Johnston on Mt. St. Helens on May 18, 1980 shook up those geologists more than we thought. Mr. Johnson was less than 5 miles straight north of Mt. St. Helens when it blew up, to the north. And we all know where Kate Hutton and Lucy Jones hang out, Pasadena. I wouldn't hang out next to a volcano either.

o

"The thing is Mammoth Mountain is on the west side of the caldera, April. I don't know that an eruption of the caldera could push to the west of the mountain. The Bishop Tuff doesn't extend to the west."

"What if the wind were in the east?"

"We'd get ash. I don't believe that's the biggest danger. The biggest danger would be the pyroclastic flow."

"How much ash?"

"Less than you'd think. The eruptions that led to the creation of the 600-year-old South Deadman Creek Dome covering the area of what is now the town of Mammoth Lakes with a layer of volcanic ash about 1 inch thick. During those eruptions, the wind first blew toward the northeast and later toward the southwest. Those eruptions also produced fiery flows of hot ash (pyroclastic flows). Depending on the wind direction and the location of an eruption site, future eruptions in the Long Valley area could spread volcanic ash over the communities of Mammoth Lakes, June Lake, or Lee Vining."

"How bad will it get?"

"The very worst is a level 4 Red Alert. Under those circumstances, we will have an explosive eruption characterized by: An eruption column reaching or exceeding 25 km above eruption vent(s); a hazardous zone subject to pyroclastic flows or surges may extend 20 km or more from eruption vent(s); an ash cloud pervades most aircraft flight paths over the region; and, a heavy downwind ashfall."

"How do you know?"

"I have a copy of the Response Plan on the computer. You should read it if you're worried."

“Just because some scientist wrote a Response Plan we can’t assume that we’ll be safe.”

“That’s why we’ll gather the family and go into the shelter.”

“You think you have it all figured out, don’t you?”

“No April, I am only speculating. It could be far less than I imagine or far worse. Like I said earlier, my greatest concern is the pyroclastic flow and we should be outside of that area. It doesn’t matter because we’re prepared. We have a whole lot of food, fuel, LP, two vehicles that we garage, a barn for the livestock and, if worse comes to worst, a means to protect ourselves.”

“I just hope it doesn’t happen in our lifetime.”

“You and I both, honey.”

o

The Alert levels are Normal (green), Advisory (yellow), Watch (orange) and Warning (red). They didn’t have long to wait to see if an earthquake would trigger the caldera. About a month later, in the Parkfield area, and for about 60km along the Fault in either direction, California experienced a M7.7 earthquake. The caldera barely grumbled. The earthquake extended from an area east of King City (Bitterwater) on the north to an area west of Buttonwillow on the south (Hwy 58). The area was sparsely populated and deaths and injuries were limited.

The magnitude of an earthquake depends on the length of the fracture, the amount of displacement and its duration. This was a long fracture, with a minimal displacement that had a short duration, less than 1 minute. The combination of factors explained what the magnitude wasn’t higher. The LVO reported a magnitude 3.9 quake as a result and a few with M<3. Tom and April felt the quake; most of the San Joaquin Valley felt it. This quake didn’t qualify as the Big One either, that would have been M>8. Even Yellowstone reacted with a small swarm of temblors <M 2.5.

This quake was a regular media event. KGO-TV in San Francisco and KABC-TV in Los Angeles, both channel 7 and ABC affiliates, had the best coverage. With a 500-channel satellite TV, Tom and April could follow the coverage. An hour into the event, the stations began to repeat themselves and they quit watching.

The day following his 16th birthday, Tom took Rob to the DMV in Fresno. Rob had taken driver’s education classes in Fresno during the summer, a requirement to get a learner’s permit if you’re under 17½. He passed the written exam and was issued his permit. By waiting until Sam was 17½ to get Sam’s permit, April had avoided the driver’s education class requirement. Sam had passed her driving exam and on her 18th birthday would be a fully licensed driver. Rob had to wait 6 months to take his driving exam.

o

Tom and April knew Garry's parents, Dean and Avis from Church. Since it looked like they were going to end up being in-laws they had them out several times over the summer of 2009. Dean was impressed with the acreage.

"You generate electricity from the barn roof?"

"Yes Dean, it's that upgraded thin film stuff. The batteries are in the shelter under the floor. It cuts down on our electrical usage and we haven't had to run the standby generator in quite some time."

"Shelter? Standby generator? What's the deal?"

"When we moved here, we experienced several power outages because of ice taking out the power lines. We put in a 15kw standby generator. I was concerned about being only 50 miles from Long Valley and used a 60' section of 10' culvert to build an underground shelter."

"I suppose you have an armory full of guns, too."

"We have a few."

"Between you and me, Tom, I picked up a M16 from a fella I know in Reno."

"Dave?"

"Do you know Dave? Damn. Small world."

"I ordered a M1A and an AR-15 from him a few years back."

"And probably ended up with a better M1A and an M16."

"How did you know?"

"Dave doesn't deal in many semi autos."

"So I learned."

"How many stalls in your barn?"

"Eight."

"Do you board horses?"

"We haven't no. We just have the 4 saddle horses and a beef we're fattening to butcher."

"I need to find someone different to board our horses. They jacked the rates again and I'm not going to pay \$100 a month per horse."

"We could probably do it for half of that, but we only have 4 empty stalls."

"That's perfect, we have 4 horses. Interested?"

"It would give Rob a source of income, sure."

"Garry talked to Avis and me. He wants to marry Samantha, but apparently you and he already talked about it."

"We had a word or two. Garry's a fine young man. I suggested that he get his feet on the ground before they took the plunge. I also told him that April and I approved of the marriage."

"He told us Sam was pushing him to get married right out of high school."

"Not any more. April had a word with her. She's going to work in the Watkins business for one year after graduating to save of money for when they get married. April is going to set her up as a Watkins dealer."

"Did you have any damage from that earthquake?"

"No. Did you?"

"A few things came off a shelf. I put them back with earthquake putty. I half expected Long Valley to react more than it did."

"It didn't, but Yellowstone did, a little. April and I were discussing what we'd do if the caldera ever erupted. I want you to know that you and your family can always come here. We have ample food stored and the shelter is quite large. Besides, if we board your horses, it only makes sense for you to come here."

"I appreciate that Tom. Can I get a look at your shelter?"

o

"You have that place set up for a nuclear war!"

"I do yes."